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HOUSE BUILT IN A DAY  
VOLUME 1  
1913-1970

HAMILTON COLLECTION



# HOUSE IN A DAY WAS A WONDERFUL FEAT



James Bryers  
Builder

## Everybody is Talking About the House Built in a Day and It Should be Inspected by Every Citizen of Hamilton

One feature of the Centennial celebration which attracted many visitors from other cities was the house in a day built at Britannia park by Ald. James Bryers. It truly was a wonderful feat, and builders and architects are loud in their praise of Mr. Bryers. Working under a big handicap from lack of men, lights being out for two hours, etc., he had much to contend with, but perseverance won the day.

The workmen on the building are entitled to no small measure of praise. They gave their best services free, and many of them stayed right on the job from start to finish. Every individual man worked his hardest, and that they were the best men in their different lines of work can be seen by a close examination of the building.

The laboring was done by 25 union laborers, who deserve special mention. The bricklayers, plasterers, painters, lumbermen and electricians, tinsmiths, steamfitters and lathers were all union men, and finished their work in the scheduled time. Some of the unions supplied the men and saw that there were plenty on the job. Others furnished Mr. Bryers with a list of the men who were anxious to work on the job, and he selected the ones he thought best.

The carpenters' union promised to have fifty men on the job, but only about a dozen turned out.

The house will be open for inspection the next few days, and every citizen should avail himself of the opportunity of examining the first house to be built in a day in Canada. Every paid admission entitles you to a guess on the house, which somebody will win for 25c. Old boys and girls should not fail to go down to Britannia park and see the house, as it is a widely advertised feature of the Centennial, and friends at home will want to know all about it.

Many who have not seen the house are under the impression that it is a small one-story affair. Far from it. It is an imposing 2½-story brick structure, and is as substantially built as if it had taken weeks to complete. It must be seen to be appreciated, and many were unable to get down yesterday, arrangements have been made to allow inspection for the next few days. The gates at Britannia park are open from early morning to late at night, and every paid admission entitles you to a guess on the number of beans in a jar which is to be seen on the grounds. Guesses may be deposited as long as the exhibition of the house is continued.

The interior of the house presents an inviting appearance, and is furnished according to the value \$5,000. The Fligh House kindly loaned the house-furnishings and furniture. In two hours' time they hung the blinds, draperies, etc., laid the rugs, put in the furniture and had it ready for immediate occupancy. A happy family was necessary to complete the picture was a happy family.

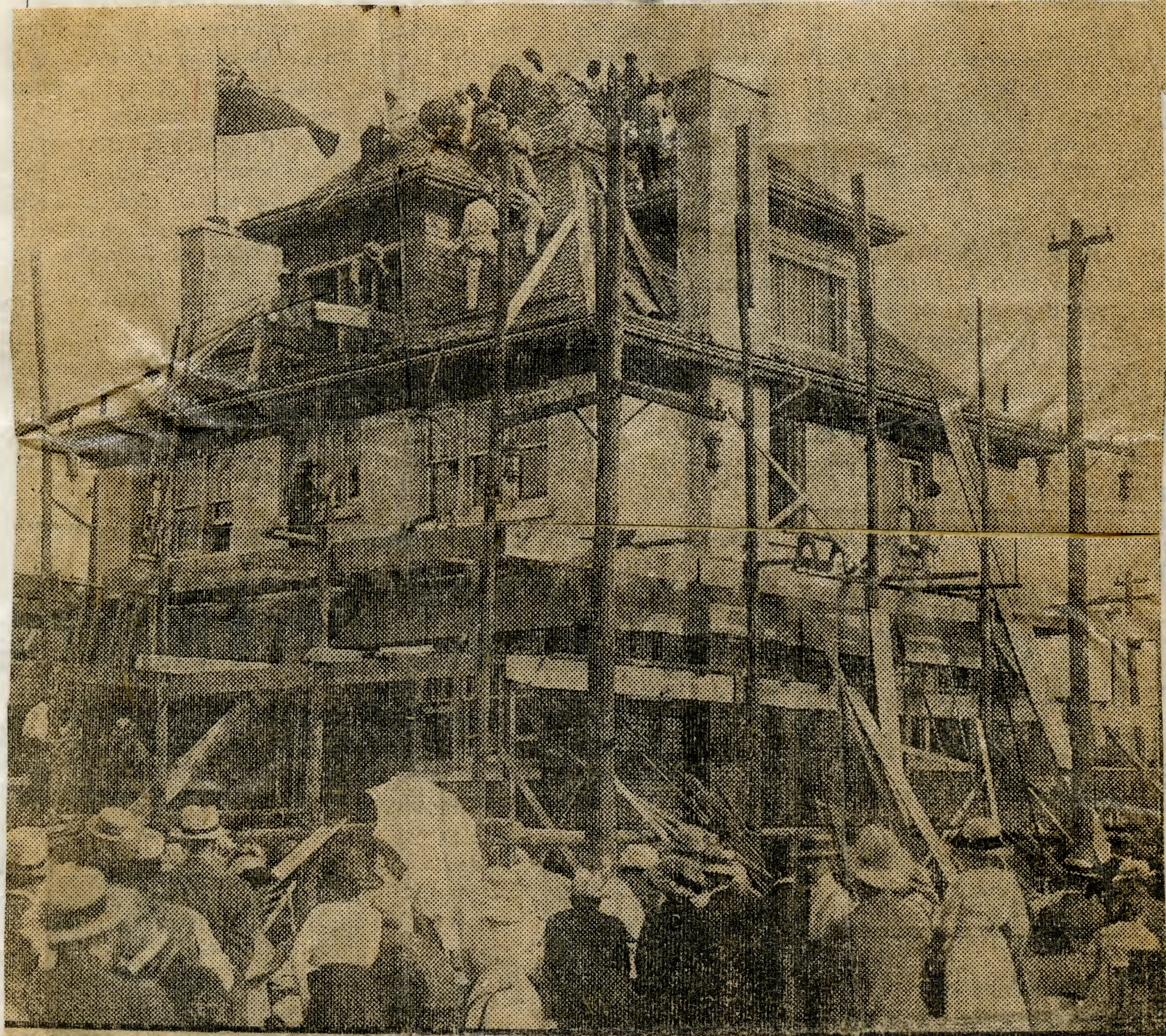
Nearly all the material used in the construction of the house was donated by representative firms, mostly Hamilton concerns.

The house is not water heated through a boiler, the boiler being donated by the Hamilton Stove and Heater company and the Vic radiators, a made-in-Hamilton product, were supplied by the manufacturers at a nominal figure. Flatt & Lambert donated the varnishes, stains, paints, oils, putty, etc., and the Crown Gypsum company donated the plaster, which was specially prepared for quick drying and at the same time giving a hard, smooth surface. The Hamilton Pressed Brick company donated 10,000 of their best-quality bricks, and the Kent-Garvin company donated the mantles and tiles and their workmen installed them in record time. The Hamilton and Toronto Sewer Pipe company donated the blue tiles and the Penn Hardware company donated all the hardware. The Standard Sanitary company, of which Hugh Wallace is the manager, donated the plumbing fixtures.

The Laidlaw Bale Tie Co. donated the nails, the shovels were donated by the Canadian Shovel and Tool company, and the Atkins Saw company donated a number of saws. H. J. Hiley and Breay donated the hand tools, electric fixtures, and their electricians did the wiring in record time. The Payne Lumber company, of Oshkosh, Wis., consigned, donated the doors. Charles Drew donated the eavetroughs, and tinsmiths put them up, and the Armstrong Supply company donated cement. L. R. Tobey donated pairs of overalls.



Speciator March 30, 1938.



**THE HOUSE THAT WAS BUILT IN A DAY** — One of the most remarkable achievements in the history of the construction industry was the erection of a house in a single day during Centennial week in Hamilton just 25 years ago. The home was built in Britannia park and was later moved to Sanford avenue north. Above are shown the workmen rushing through their work.

IS THE MOST  
AN ACCOUNT.

B.M.

Other For Dad and the Best!

**WHISKY**

Established 1840



# COMPLETE HOUSE WAS BUILT HERE IN A SINGLE DAY

Ald. Bryers Conceived  
Unique Centennial  
Attraction

## MET DIFFICULTIES

It is 25 years ago that Hamilton witnessed one of the most remarkable feats ever accomplished, the building of a house in a single day. No cheap shack was this famous house, but a handsome residence of brick that was demolished only a few years ago. It was located on Sanford avenue north, next to the Sanford avenue fire station.

Mayor John Allan turned the first sod for the house as a feature of Centennial week, and hundreds paid an admission of 25 cents to see the swarms of workmen at their Herculean task.

The Spectator carries the following account:

"Shortly after 7 o'clock Wednesday night (August 13, 1913), the last stroke was added to the house in a day, erected by Ald. James Bryers, and with its completion came the consummation of one of the greatest events ever attempted in the building line in Canada.

"Actual work was started on this house at 4.45 p.m. on Tuesday, when Mayor Allan turned the first sod, and had it not been for a two hours' delay to the work the evening of the same day, caused by the electric lights going out, the building would have been completed by 4.45 p.m. Wednesday. Deducting this two hours, which is only fair to Mr. Bryers, the 24 hours was up at 6.45 p.m., and the last stroke was put on shortly after 7 p.m., thus completing the big building in less than 25 actual working hours.

### Only 16 Hours

"The original plans prepared by Mr. Bryers for his gigantic task called for the completion of the building in 16 hours, but he gave himself 24 hours in order to allow for emergencies. This plan was based on a certain number of workmen, and had these been supplied by the local unions, the building would not only have been completed in 16 hours, but the surrounding grounds, lawns, etc., would have been cleared of materials and put in clean shape before the expiration of the 24 hours.

"From the moment Mr. Bryers first conceived the idea of erecting the house in a day as one of the big features for centennial week, he always said that the success of

the whole scheme depended entirely upon being able to secure a sufficient number of workmen and this he had provided through his own efforts. If the unions had not interfered there would have been no hitch in the plans. A short time previous to the opening of centennial week, the unions began to knock the enterprise, some of them going so far as to place fines of \$50 on any union member who worked on the building. Coming as it did at the last moment, this interference caused a change in the plans and for a few days it looked as though the whole scheme

would be dropped. Through strong personal effort, however, on the part of Mr. Bryers, backed by almost every contractor in the city and a number of prominent business men, the trouble was finally adjusted by the unions agreeing to supply all the men required on condition that Mr. Bryers employ no non-union men. This Mr. Bryers was only too willing to agree to, and again everything looked lovely. The unions agreed to supply 125 hod-carriers and 60 carpenters, but when the first sod was turned and the word given to start work, there were but 32 hod-carriers and six union carpenters on the job. There were but two things left to Mr. Bryers to do. One was to drop the scheme or put on non-union men and he adopted the latter course by putting on a number of non-union carpenters and started the work with 32 hod-carriers instead of the 125 which the union had agreed to supply, as his schedule called for.

"The building is 34 by 33 feet, outside measurements, and may properly be called a four-storey house. It has nine rooms.

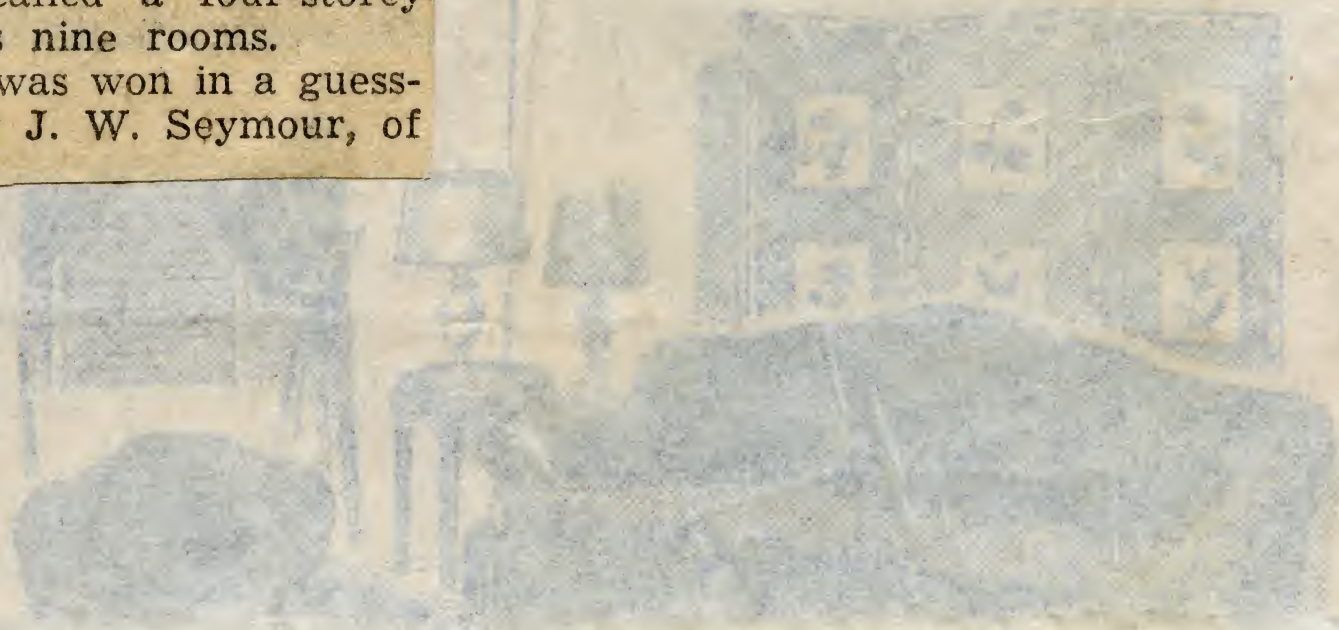
"The house was won in a guessing contest by J. W. Seymour, of Hagersville."

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The residents of Queen street south of Aberdeen avenue, 2121, be congratulated upon the splendid co-operative efforts of the carnival decorations. For more than a quarter of a mile on both sides of the street and extending right through to the Beckett drive many hundreds of Japanese lanterns were seen in the moonlight and under the natural foliage of the trees, produce a splendid beautiful scene, well worth an evening walk to see. The lanterns were lighted from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. and the scene was most beautiful.

## URS OF FAITHFUL

Our Furnishing Co. has always had a reputation for serving the citizens of the city the best merchandise that can be put upon the shelves of our organization.





Spectator Mar. 15 - 1946

## English Paper Recalls House Erected in Day

Nottingham Post Is Little  
Sceptical of Hamilton's  
1913 Achievement

Speedy as is house building these days, in some places, there is still interest in the fact that back in August, 1913, a house was built in a day in Hamilton.

This is recalled by a copy of the Nottingham Evening Post, from England, sent to the Spectator by a former resident of Hamilton, Miss Mabel Dexter. The paper shows three views of this house, supplied by Miss Dexter, during its construction, with the comment that they are interesting, "in view of the speedy house building of to-day."

Miss Dexter, who observes that the house was built during the centennial of 1913, at that time was living with her parents and brother at 81 Gage avenue north. They went to England in 1914 and she recalls many happy memories of her residence in Hamilton, and expresses the hope of some day returning to renew old acquaintances.

In her letter accompanying the copy of the paper Miss Dexter said the item regarding this house caused a good deal of interest and controversy since many found it hard to believe, and also inquired what became of the house.

### It Was Done

Many others here have also expressed scepticism, but the building of this brick house in a day, complete with water, light and telephone, is no fiction but actual fact.

It was erected in the old Britannia Park, and afterwards moved to a lot on Sanford avenue, later being torn down to make way for the Central High School of Commerce, built on the site in 1932.

James Bryers, local contractor, who at that time was a member of the City Council, smiled when asked to-day if he had any scheme for attempting a similar venture in connection with the city's Centennial this July. He remembers, however, the immense amount of planning and work to push this venture through in 1913 and said 100 teams were ready to go to work hauling supplies and other jobs after the late Mayor John Allan turned the first sod.



Spectator Feb. 8. 1947



**HERE** the workers are seen starting at the excavation for the basement, which was dug entirely by hand . . . . .



**HOUSE BUILT IN A DAY**—Mayor John Allan stands beside the bean jar, the lucky guesser of whose contents won the house built in a day . . . . .



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Spectator Feb. 2, 1947

# Inquiry From Glaswegian Recalls Early Enterprise

**Feature of Centennial Celebration In 1913  
Was Erection of Completely Finished Home  
In 25 Working Hours — Builder Reminisces**

The house that was built in a day.

That's what a Spectator correspondent in Glasgow, Scotland, wants to know about; probably with the idea of showing his friends that Canadians can get a move on, if necessary. (Glaswegians aren't so slow, either. They have a subway transportation system, which is more than Hamilton has).

## At Centennial

Anyway, J. MacMillan of Glasgow knows that Hamilton's famed house built in a day was erected in 1913, during Centennial celebrations. But he wants to know a few more details.

Just to bring the story up to date, the Spectator phoned James Bryers, who built the house in 1913. He was an alderman then; now he is past 70, but with a full recollection of the feat which attracted attention both in America and England.

The house was built in old Britannia Park, a nine-room structure, but a couple of months later it was moved by Archie Goodale to Sanford Avenue North.

## Finally Wrecked

"When it was moved, it was changed to a four-apartment building," Mr. Bryers recalled. "It was wrecked when the High School of Commerce was built."

Mr. MacMillan of Glasgow asks: "What was the material used?"

"Brick, with stucco on the second storey," Mr. Bryers replies, through the Spectator.

"Was it completely furnished?" asks Mr. MacMillan.

"Yes, by The Right House. I remember the rugs were worth \$2,000."

"Did the owner receive it through a guessing contest?" asks the Glaswegian.

## Contest Sidelights

At this point, Mr. Bryers has a few interesting sidelights, not included in the Spectator's account of August 14, 1913, when the remarkable feat was described.

The house was won by J. W. Seymour, of Hagersville, who came closest to guessing the correct number of beans in a large bottle on a table in Britannia Park.

"I remember," recalled Mr. Bryers, "that we had quite a time getting the proper person. No claimant came forth, and we were about to advertise that the house would be sold and the proceeds given to charity."

"Then, the winner's wife was sending his suit to the cleaners when she found the winning ticket. I guess he didn't even know he had it."

Mr. Bryers recalls also that there was considerable consternation when a clumsy guesser broke the large bottle as he was holding it in an effort to establish the number of beans in it.

The winner sold the house back to Mr. Bryers.

"The building is 34 by 33 feet, outside measurements," the newspaper account of 1913 says, "and may properly be called a four-storey house. It has nine rooms."

## Mayor Turns Sod

Mayor John Allan turned the first sod as a feature of the Centennial and Hamilton Old Boys' Week, and hundreds paid an admission of 25 cents to see the swarm of workmen at their Herculean task.

The Spectator account reads:

"Shortly after 7 o'clock Wednesday night (August 13, 1913) the last stroke was added to the house in a day, erected by Alderman James Bryers, and with its completion came the consummation of one of the greatest events ever attempted in the building line in Canada."

"Actual work was started on Tuesday, when Mayor Allan turned the first sod, and had it not been for a two hours' delay to the work the evening of the same day, caused by the electric lights going out, the building would have been completed by 4.45 p.m. Wednesday."

"Deducting two hours, which is only fair to Mr. Bryers, the 24

hours was up at 6.45 p.m., and the last stroke was put on shortly after 7 p.m., thus completing the building in less than 25 actual working hours."

## Labour Troubles

The newspaper account then discusses the difficulty with the union situation, "some of them (the unions) going so far as to place a \$50 fine on any union member who worked on the building." This difficulty was finally solved when the trades agreed to supply the men, provided no non-union men were employed on the job.

"The unions agreed to supply 125 hod-carriers and 60 carpenters, but when the first sod was turned and the word given to start work, there were but 32 hod-carriers and six union carpenters on the job," the story relates.

Rather than drop the scheme entirely, non-union carpenters were engaged and the remarkable job was successfully finished. The house cost between \$7,000 and \$8,000 to build.

Mr. Bryers recalled that some time ago, he was having dinner at the Book-Cadillac Hotel in Detroit. Seated with him was a man from Scotland.

## Noised Abroad

"When I happened to mention the house-built-in-day, he nearly jumped off his chair," Mr. Bryers related. "He had heard about it in Scotland, but I guess he had thought it was just a lot of Yankee talk till he heard me speak of it."

The Hamilton builder figures that Jack Moffat, the plasterer on the job, told it in Scotland on one of his visits there and that the story of the feat was greeted skeptically.

But about Mr. MacMillan, of Glasgow, who wanted the information about the 24-hour house: "I will be very grateful to you if you can supply the answer . . . The Spectator could always deliver the goods."

Above are the answers for Mr. MacMillan.

## WANTED

Three Intelligent Girls  
To Be Trained For  
Skilled Factory Work  
High Wages — Five Day Week  
Holidays With Pay And Bonus  
APPLY

SOVEREIGN POTTERS LTD  
282 Sherman Ave. North

## WANTED

EXPERIENCED TYPIST &  
DICTAPHONE OPERATOR  
for large manufacturing concern  
Reply — Give age, education, wages

## SMART GIRLS

OR

## YOUNG WOMEN

Wanted for full time work  
Good wages, rest periods, car-  
teria and pleasant working  
conditions

Ideal Launderers and  
Dry Cleaners  
300 Barton Street East

## EXPERIENCED



Spectator Nov. 23-1957

1937

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**THE 24-HOUR HOUSE** — Throngs of Hamiltonians crowd Britannia Park as the sun of August 13, 1913 begins to set and as local building trades men and laborers push to complete a house started just 20 hours before. They made it.

The mansion above built in 24 hours captured the popular imagination of two continents. It was the highlight of the 1912 centennial celebration of the city. Bill Pindar stands at left.

Today, the house is all but complete. It is a beautiful specimen of the work of the local building trades men and laborers. The house is a masterpiece of architecture, and it is a great pleasure to see it completed in such a short time.

It was a very busy day, and the house was completed in 24 hours. The house is a beautiful specimen of the work of the local building trades men and laborers. The house is a masterpiece of architecture, and it is a great pleasure to see it completed in such a short time.

Bill Pindar, who stands at left in the photograph, is the man who started the house. He is a very busy man, and he is a great pleasure to see it completed in such a short time.

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"I thought it was Christmas morning," she said.

Always Busy

Friend of dolls and girls, she is Mrs. Daisy Waddle, of York Street. Although she is a very busy woman, she is a great pleasure to see it completed in such a short time.

Later in the day a man named Mr. Smith and said that he was in the Duke Street office at the time Mr. Smith was in the office.

He told Mr. Smith that the house was at the time Mr. Smith was in the office. He repeated the statement of the house.

to be "deadly"

For the loneliness felt by a child in hospital there is only one prescription — a doll to play with, a game, or a game, to forget.

which could keep it from being out of the house.

The soft red and white water pressure behind it.

## Badly Injured In Car Woman Awarded \$

Both drivers had been driving some time before the accident, but that it had not been established what effect the alcohol had had upon them.

Sudden Swerve

The written judgment awarded Mrs. Wilfred L. F. Ford, 45, of 348 John Street South, was driving his car toward Hamilton at about 4 a.m. on September 16, 1936, when it was involved in a collision near the Manoleum Curve on Highway 2.

A car, being driven by Donald Sver toward Toronto, was driving in the same direction as the Ford car, and the two cars collided.

which could keep it from being out of the house.

Sponsored by the weekly, an Indian publication, the competition drew 27,000 entries from all over the world. Canadian children won 30.





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Spectator Nov. 23-1957

AH, THEY HAD WORKMEN IN THOSE DAYS'

# One-day House Brought City Fame

By JOE CURTIN  
Scotland doubted it.  
England refused to believe

The Americans ultimately put in "Believe It or Not".  
And Hamilton old boys departing from the 1913 centennial celebration of the city's founding took the tale far afield of the marvellous three-storey house that was built in their home town in one day — 24 hours.

It was a seven-day wonder then and such it may well be to this day and for many to come. "Ah, they had workmen in those days," sighs William Pindar, spry and genial pensioner of 75 Picton Street East.

Mr. Pindar appears as a handsome and strapping 27-year-old in a picture taken on the spot of the plastering gang that worked on the house built at Britannia Park almost overnight.

**Substantial Structure**  
It wasn't what some refer to today as a "handyman's special" then.

The building was 34 by 33 feet with full cement and brick basement, complete lower floor including kitchen, dining room, den, hall and parlor, four bedrooms and bath upstairs and had three finished rooms in its attic and two fireplaces — 12 rooms by modern count but listed as nine in those first, fine careless days before World War I when kitchens, bathrooms and attic space just weren't listed as living area, any more than closets are today.

The structure was panelled with fumed oak and mahogany and when the workmen departed it had gas central heating, plumbing and gas lines installed and operative, and hardwood floors waxed and polished in all three upper floors.

"We put 1,700 yards of plastering in the attic alone," recalls Mr. Pindar. "That's more than there is in many average cottages today."

He and a crew of some 40 fellow plasterers plastered the attic and the other two levels of the house in two and half hours using pure gypsum supplied free of charge for the job straight from the mine at Lythmore.

Mr. Pindar, recently scouting through some old papers, came on the pair of pictures published with this article.

"Well, we arrived at Britannia Park about two o'clock in the afternoon. There was nothing there but the green grass and some supplies," Mr. Pindar recalled. "But about 4 o'clock the laborers tore into the dig-



**WILLIAM PINDAR**  
*Worked 'For Fun'*

ging. There were no bulldozers in those days . . . just spades."

**Almost 400 Involved**  
Mr. Pindar had apparently arrived in the van of a small army of the city's laborers and craftsmen who were to number almost 400 hard at work as the project progressed.

"The bricklayers were next and they put in the cellar. Next the ironworkers put in the floor beams. It was dark by this time and you never saw such scurrying in all your life. The park looked like an anthill.

"The carpenters rushed in next. The outside scaffolding went up. It was English style scaffolding built of poles.

"Then the lights went out."

It was a sweltering hot night August 12, 1913, when the Herculean task began and the men under the direction of Alderman James Bryers, whose idea the whole scheme had been, paused in their heated task while the primitive lighting arrangements of the day were put back into working order.

"They had what was called cataract lamps," Mr. Pindar explains. These were apparently a carbon arc lamp of uncertain stability. Some may be seen suspended like circular birdhouses from the temporary hydro poles surrounding the house.

"At that time there would be one hung only at street corners in the city," he remembered.

Meanwhile hundreds were crowding into the park at an admission of 25 cents each to watch the swarms of workmen hurling themselves into the construction. Time was ticking past, and they had lost two hours while the lights were being repaired.

All night long the clatter of hand tools and hubbub of activity rang across the park. Ladies served refreshments from laden tables and the brass band of the Livingstone Church played at intervals.

**Dawn's Early Light**  
The fever of activity continued unabated as first light and then dawn broke. By this time walls and roof were in place, shingling was commencing and workmen stood by to apply a roughcast plaster coat to the second storey of the structure as bricklayers finished the final courses of their work.

At 7 p.m. the final nail was hammered in place, three coats of quick drying paint were drying, and the last of the scaffolding and building debris was rumbling out the park gates on the high piled tailgates of freight wagons.

Inside, decorators from the Right House were finishing a two-hour project in which they had completely furnished the house from attic to basement with \$5,000 worth of furniture.

"There was even a sewing machine," Mr. Pindar added.

**Approval Given**  
The city building inspector, who had regarded the whole project with ill-disguised disapproval from its beginning, appeared at the front door and lo! . . . he was smiling. The structure was approved.

The time limit had been met. An enlarged crowd applauded the last spurt of activity and Ald. Bryers who had stood by through every minute of the construction was run home in an auto car, dead beat.

He was a disappointed man.

The project should have been finished in 16 hours as originally planned, he muttered fitfully on retiring. The workmen of 1913, he was heard to remark shortly thereafter, did not compare with those of 10 and 20 years before.

But the feat wrought in Britannia Park where the Hamilton Forum now stands caught the imagination of the world. Its fame apparently is long in dying.

The triumph of local labor as recently as 1947 was being recalled in Glasgow. At any rate the Spectator received a query from a J. MacMillan of that city wanting to know if the report he had heard at "the local" was true.

By 1946 the one-day house had been removed, changed into apartments and finally razed to make way for High School of Commerce. But it had become a topic abroad once more and people in Nottingham, England, were telling each other that the rumor of the original event was "sheer budney".

But a former Hamiltonian, Miss Mabel Dexter, who lived in Nottingham, soon set them straight, reportedly causing no end of amazement.

In October 1939, the late Robert Ripley in his celebrated series circulated through the newspapers of the U.S. and Canada a sketch and report of the 1913 accomplishment.

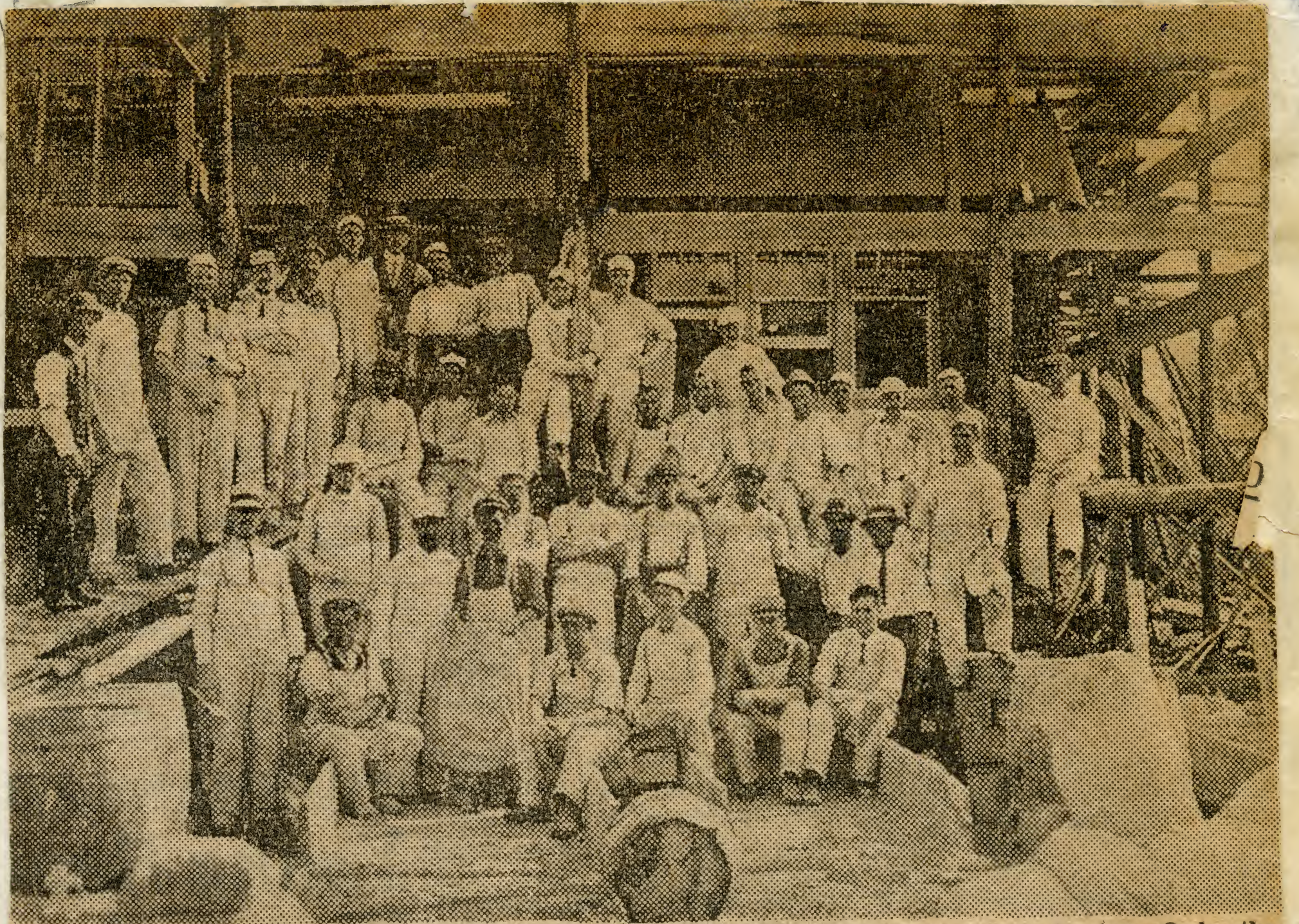
To Bill Pindar, who will be 76 today, it is still a warm and happy memory. He recalls men who worked with him such as Bill Parkins and his father George, Alderman Bryers, Stanley Waddell, a Mr. Hannaford, Jack Bigrigg, John Gleason, Jim Wright, Fred Lane and Jack Moffat, the plastering boss on the job.

**No Pay For Job**

"There was no pay. We did it just for the fun of it. Our unions were to get silver souvenirs but they never materialized," he remembers with a smile.

The event proved a highlight of the centennial rites. The house was won for 25 cents by a man in Hagersville who guessed the correct number of beans in a huge bottle.





**PLASTERING CHAMPS OF THE PAST —** Pictures of Hamilton labor's 'finest hour' owned by William Pindar, 75 Picton Street East, show the plastering crew of which he was a member. Pictured are George Parkins, third from left back row. Foreman Jack Moffat, fourth; Stanley Waddell, seventh and

a Mr. Hannaford in straw boater. Only the nickname of the man clutching the post survives. Shorty he was called. Others are John Gleason, Jim Wright, Mr. Pindar at right end of second row, Fred Land and Bill Parkins, centre of first row.

Spectator Nov. 30 - 1957

## Old-Timers Recall House Built In Day

Hamilton craftsmen are a hardy lot.

They also appear to be a long lived segment of the community.

Following the appearance of an article in last Saturday's Spectator about the building of a house in one day during the 1913 centennial of the city several men associated with the project have been in touch with this newspaper.

Notable among them was William Kinch of 301 East 28th Street who celebrated his 89th birthday in June.

"I retired from business four years ago," Mr. Kinch, a builder and carpenter by trade explained. "But I remember the building of the house very well."

### Grand Parade

He recalled, there was a grand parade through the city as a prelude to the launching of the 24-hour construction project.

All the materials for its construction were loaded in horse-drawn wagons and conducted through the streets of downtown Hamilton (up Barton, down James, along Main, down King) and finally to the park site.

The group which provided the music, he says, was the East Hamilton Progressive Association Band of which Mr. Kinch was president at that time.

The band led the parade followed by a detailed model of the house itself mounted on a livery wagon and trailed by the van of materials.

The volunteer tradesmen received small gifts... the plasterers got overalls; bricklayers each a trowel and the carpenters received commemorative saws.

"I still have mine right here," said Mr. Kinch who was carpenter on the job.

Miss M. Stott, of Toronto, in a letter has identified her grandfather in the photograph of the plastering crew shown in Saturday's article. He was the late Joseph Marshall, second from the right in the back row.

Due to the technique used to reproduce these photographs the Spectator has no way of providing reprints of these pictures.

The several persons who have sought such pictures have been advised to make arrangements with their owners.

See also p 120 - a



Spectator  
June 20, 1970

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# House that James built — in a day

It is 57 years since Hamilton witnessed one of the most remarkable construction feats ever accomplished.

Scotland doubted it.

England refused to believe it.

The Americans put it in "Believe it or not."

And city planners ultimately buried it.

IN 1913, in Hamilton's east end, a house was built in a day, a three-storey brick wonder which 400 men put together in 23 hours.

The idea was conceived by Mr. James Bryers, at that time an alderman and prominent building contractor, as a special attraction to commemorate Hamilton's centennial week.

At 4.45 p.m., Aug. 13, 1913, Mr. Bryers, with the aid of district trade unions had assembled a cast of 400 workmen in Hamilton's old Britannia Park.

Mayor John Allan then turned the first sod for the house while hundreds of citizens who had each paid 25 cents to witness the Herculean task looked on.

Twenty-three hours later, the house was completely finished and ready for occupants.

AND IT was no cheap shack.

The building was 34 by 33 feet with full cement and brick basement, complete lower floor including kitchen, dining room, hall and parlor, four bedrooms and bath upstairs. There were three finished rooms in its attic and two fireplaces — 12 rooms by modern count but listed as nine in those care-free days before the First World War when kitchens, bathrooms and attic space weren't listed as living area.

The structure was panelled with fumed oak and mahogany and when the workmen departed it had gas central heating, plumbing and gas lines installed and operative, and hardwood floors waxed and polished in all three upper floors.

"AH, THEY had workmen in those days," wrote William Pinder in 1957 recalling the feat in which he participated 44 years previously.

"We put 1,700 yards of plastering in the attic alone," he recalled. There was nothing there but the green grass and a few supplies when we started and there were no bulldozers in those days, just spades," he recalled.

He described the problems encountered when darkness fell. "They had what was called cataract lamps which were of uncertain stability. The work was delayed when the lights broke down but the builders welcomed the break as it was a sweltering hot night. It took two hours to get things rolling again. When the lights were back in order, you never saw such scurrying in all your life. The park looked like an anthill."

HUNDREDS of citizens stood throughout the night in the park watching the construction of a house which was to stand for 19 years.

Women served refreshments from laden tables and the brass band of Livingstone United Church played at intervals.

When the house was completed on a Tuesday afternoon, only one problem remained — who was to move into it. According to an account by Mr. Bryers in 1947, the house was to be given to the man whose guess was closest to the number of beans in a large bottle on a table in the park. But nobody could find the man with the winning ticket.

"NO CLAIMANT came forth and we were about to advertise that the house would be sold and the proceeds given to charity," Mr. Bryers wrote. "Then the winner's wife was sending her suit to the cleaners when she found the ticket. I guess he didn't even know he had it."

The house was won by J. W. Seymour of Hagersville. Two months after completion, it was moved from the park to Sanford Avenue.

There it stood as one of the great tourist attractions in the province for 19 years. The mansion seemed to capture the imagination of two continents. North Americans and Britons heard about it, couldn't believe it, and just had to see it.

IN 1932, however, city planners tore it down to make way for the Central High School of Commerce.

But for many of Hamilton's senior citizens the memory of the famous house built in a day still lives on.

For what else in Hamilton has ever made Riley's "Believe it or Not?"

(b'trow)

(cont'd)

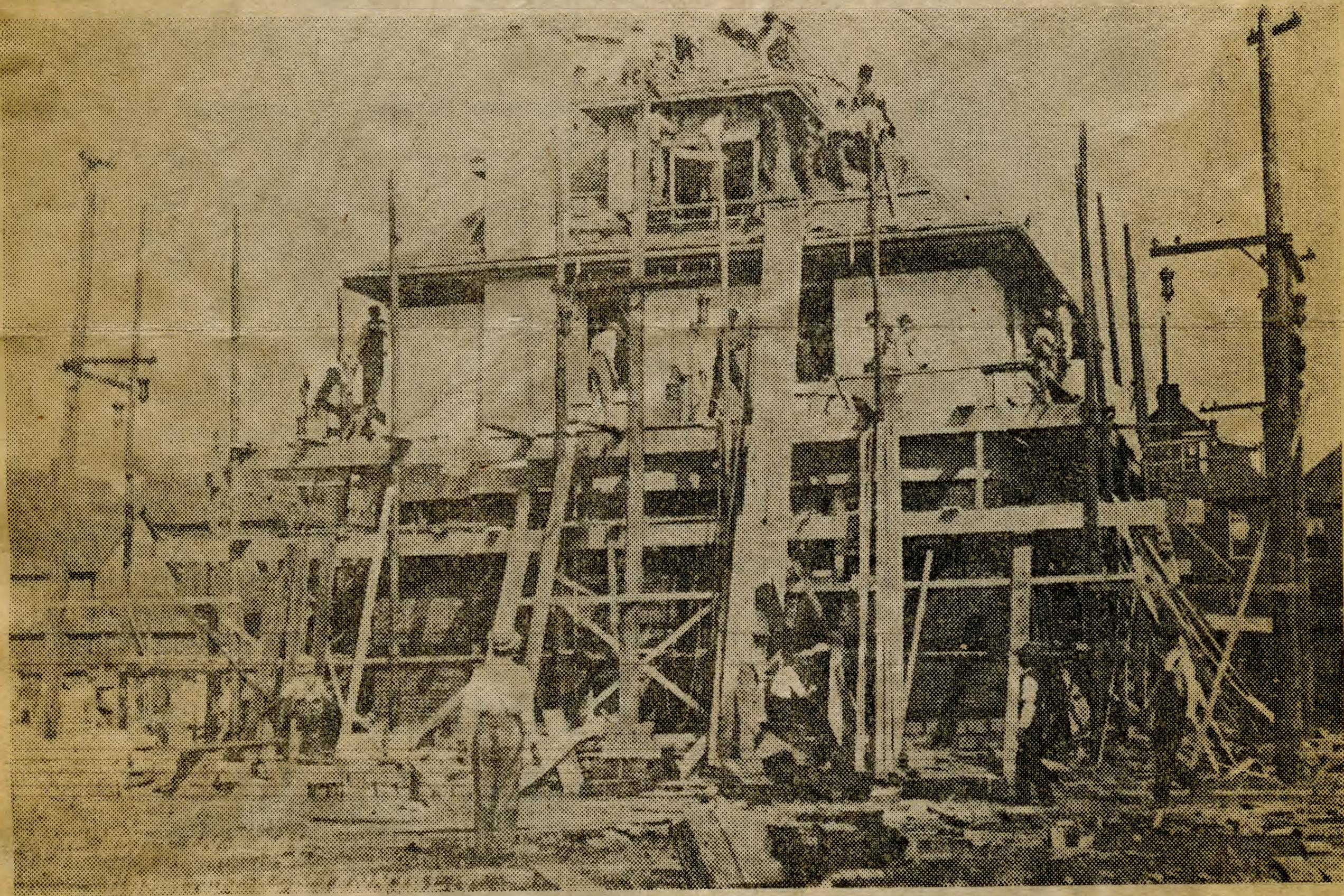


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not to go



Swarms of men make short work of the foundation



Presto! Walls and a roof

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June 20, 1970 (cont'd)

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And there it stands, ready for occupancy